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ABSTRACT

This document discusses play behavior. Play is considered by many people to be useless; in fact harmful, as it may impede work. This attitude is related to historical and cultural patterns, particularly the work ethic of Western Civilization. Others consider play to be useful, adaptive activity. Evidence supporting this view is reviewed, including animal research, cross-cultural studies, and reports of play training producing generalized positive effects in therapy. This paper attempts to reconcile the differences of these views by looking at play as types of adaptation that maximize the capacity for variability. Play is considered a personally useful type of adaptation having to do with subjective reactions to experience rather than objective accommodation within it. Play responses mediate novelty, but do not guarantee its access to external cultural usefulness. The importance given to play in recent years is a manifestation of the need for novel thought because of the diversification of social roles in modern times. The structure of play is discussed; universally-determined and culturally-determined play are differentiated. Implications for education are considered, stressing the advantages of play training for creativity and adaptability. (DP)

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Play as Variability Training

And, As the Useless Made Useful

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Play as useless

When a ten year old asks you what happens if you cross an elephant with peanut butter and then tells you you get a jar of peanut butter that never forgets, or an elephant that sticks to the roof of your mouth, you laugh and pass on. Light-hearted trivialities of that sort are amusing but they are not very important. As long as the ten year old buries his head back into his arithmetic, all is well. But what you fear with that sort of nonsense, is that before you can turn around, everyone else is chattering away with the same sort of playfulness, and your lesson is lost. "How did the skeleton get pregnant?" "She made no bone about it!" There's no going on after that. Even when the child at play is quite earnest and preoccupied as with his stamps or her jackstones, there is still the feeling that it does not really matter. Of course, the earnest play keeps them quiet and makes playground supervision somewhat easier, but that's your value not theirs. Whatever value it has to them is not very important to you.

It is customary to say that our negative attitude to children's play is due to the great importance that the work ethic has assumed in the development of Western Civilization. The work ethic is the view that man justifies and redeems himself through productive work. While this may be true, it is also true that most societies throughout history have not been particularly interested in encouraging children's play. Our Western attitude, therefore, is merely a recent example of a very widespread human indifference to children's play activities. In most societies the struggle for subsistence has been sufficiently difficult that children have been employed in that struggle from the earliest ages. They have been kept home to look after the younger children. In a recent trip to Mauritius which is a small island in the midst of the Indian Ocean dominated by a sugar plantation economy, I witnessed just such an arrangement. The Hindu mother and father were out on the plantation, the father cutting cane for the factory, the mother collecting the leaves of the plant to bring home to feed the cow. Meantime the seven year old was back at home cooking the evening rice on a wood stove outside at ground level, while the five year old held the baby on her lap and the two year olds sat nearby on the ground. There was little evidence of active play. At a nursery school nearby to which some mothers sent their children, fifty or sixty three and four year olds sat quietly on long forms while the one teacher instructed them on how to make letters on their slates. It was a parody of the monitorial systems of early nineteenth century England, where thousands of older age children were treated in an equally mass fashion, though they do not appear to have responded with the same passivity.

Even when the children of a society are not this passive, their childhood play may still be extremely limited. The Levine's description of the herding culture of the Nyansongo's of Kenya indicates that the children showed considerable vigor in climbing trees, shooting slings at birds, fighting with each other, damming up streams, but also that the adults often actively discouraged these or other signs of play because they interfered with essential work activities. (In B.B. Whiting (ed.): Six Cultures: Studies of Child Rearing. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1963).

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In general, we may say that when children are early inducted into the world of adult work, and when that world is tightly prescribed for survival purposes and the children are important to that survival, there is little encouragement for or time to play. In the circumstances of today we see the clearest expression of that age-old negative attitude when paraprofessionals from lower economic groups work with children in a nursery or preschool settings. Often these settings have been lavishly provided with sand tray toys, block corners, house corners, water play areas, slides, etc. The lower economic children do not know what to do with such facilities having never had access to them before. They often begin their time there by taking possession of whatever they can and simply holding onto it. They may spend a month or so in simple territorial and object possession. Unfortunately, adult helpers from the same economic levels often see no value in these things and, in fact, ignore them. They have never themselves had free play access to such materials, and they do not know what to do with them now. They do believe, however, that success in the modern world requires success at school, and so they do everything they can to help and encourage their three and four year old charges to learn their letters, their colors, their shapes and all those other cognitive dimensions which some modern psychologists have emphasized as critical in early learning. Usually they are not very successful in the latter. If there is enough free time, however, most of the children will have been learning how to play with the play materials from some of their more innovative or advantaged peers. I watched one four year old girl in such a group try for four months to induct other children of her age into fantasy play. At first she appeared to be completely incomprehensible to them, but gradually she was imitated by some of the others, so that by the end of the year she had a considerable camp of moderately imaginative followers.

Teachers even of middle class background still ask me whether a child with high levels of fantasy is not in danger of nervous breakdown. The answer is no, that in most cases, he is only in danger of becoming an outstanding scientist, writer, scholar or perhaps even an international chess player. As the researches of Jerome Singer indicate, fantasy is a definite asset to the thinking life. (Day dreaming: An Introduction to the Experimental Study of Inner-Experience. N.Y.: Random House, 1966).

Still we are discussing the widespread sense that play is useless. My examples are meant to show that indeed much of it would have been useless throughout most of human history. But in addition to that meaning, of uselessness, we have to add a more profound sense in which play seems to be useless because it doesn't yield a product. In today's educational jargon it is process oriented, not product oriented. The person's activity while playing seems useless because he is not trying to be useful. After all, the riddle cited at the beginning hardly helps one to distinguish between elephants and peanut butter, and the one about the skeleton isn't of much use in sex education. We must judge that whatever play may be, it will tend to elude almost any commonsense definition of the useful life, life where one is concerned with getting necessary things done, or understanding cultural values, etc. Furthermore, as adults we feel far removed from the play concerns of children, so have additional reason to experience some annoyance when this culturally distant phenomena of theirs interferes with the work that we must get done in educating them. It would seem to me better to acknowledge our feelings of impatience and irritation at this thing, rather than to try to ignore or hide it, even if we become convinced that indeed, the uselessness is not quite as useless as we had thought. Amongst educators I find that it is only with experienced Nursery School teachers that there is a very widespread feeling that play must be useful in some way. And this

comes from their long experience of working with young children and discovering that they are highly activated in their play, but are seldom equally motivated for such a long period with anything else. Rubbing shoulders with the natives in this way serves to counter to some extent the long standing prejudices that I have been outlining. Physical educators also have a considerable tolerance for children's play, but perhaps only because they have been able to convert it to the action of physical exercise as a form of useful body building work.

Play as useful

Some writers have sought to make play's uselessness a desirable thing. They have usually suggested that there is something ultimately aesthetic or irrational about play. And in this way have combined the commonsense acceptance of play's worthlessness with an idealization of the same phenomena. This has permitted them to see play as an escape from determinism and a justification of man's deeper spirituality. Whatever the ultimate merits of such a position it tends to proscribe the systematic study of the behavior itself by assuming its irrationality from the start. Against this position, there has always been quite a body of thought that there is some systematic sense in which play must be useful. Most of the play theorists of the early part of this century simply took this view for granted, figuring that play must be preadaptive or some sort of rehearsal or it couldn't make any biological sense. More recently Piaget has taken a related view that what we call play is a particular manifestation of all adaptive activity. In favor of these types of argument is the clear evidence that as we rise phylogenetically so does the amount of playing increase. The higher animals play more than the lower ones. Man plays most of all. Again the cross-cultural studies that I have carried out with John M. Roberts also show that as cultures increase in complexity, so do their games (Avedon, E. & Sutton-Smith, B. The Study of Games. N.Y.: John Wiley, 1971). Moreover we have demonstrated that games are systematically related to other aspects of the cultures in which they are found. They cannot be thought of as non-essential parts of the larger cultural systems. Usually the games are related to some child-training pressure, and appear to symbolize certain basic motives coming from that pressure, but then are in turn, of some adaptive value for the group which uses them. For example, in a world-wide sample, games of chance were shown to exist more frequently in those cultures where children are treated restrictively during the early years. They are nurtured but isolated, thus increasing, it is thought, their dependence upon nurturing figures, and their belief in the omnipotence of those figures. These infantile conflicts become written large as a belief in lady luck and a willingness to trade and gamble for basic supplies. The groups which play these games tend to be nomadic groups and have uncertain food resources. In a peoples who must move in a relatively hostile world and be able to take chances with courage, it would be beneficial to rear children who had a positive investment in chance and who could, through their games, learn the various characteristics of probability taking. While the complete pattern of these relationships has not yet been fully established by Roberts and co-workers, it does seem likely from these results that the games are a part of a larger fabric where basic adaptive problems lead to related ways of training children, which in turn become represented in the games they like to play, and the things they learn from them.

Still even if the available evidence does suggest that games are useful to the cultures where they are to be found, this does not establish that play is equally useful or that it trains the players in any particular way. Fortunately we have more direct evidence about the latter from some recent studies. The forerunner was a work by Sara Smilansky (The Effects of Sociodramatic Play on Disadvantaged Preschool Children. N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1968). As a school psychologist she had had some difficulty

in attempting analytic therapy which requires conversation with many of the new immigrant children in Isfael. Switching to play therapy as an approach she quickly discovered that they did not know how to play imaginatively and could not be reached in that way either. Her next logical step was to teach them how to play imaginatively by participating in play with them. Her book recounts her efforts and her results. She was able to improve their level of imaginative activity, and with it their persistence in play, their social interaction and their capacity for verbal communication, all outcomes which she reasonably claimed showed the usefulness of play training. And from our point of view, showed some of the usefulness of play itself. Subsequent researchers have had similar results. In New York, Joan Tuttle Frayburg, in a Ph.D. thesis at City College, Graduate Center, 1969, entitled "The enhancement of fantasy ability in lower class kindergarten children", found that by playing with children she could increase their level of imaginative play. She was able to shift them from a level where, as she describes it, they were extremely unimaginative in their play, introducing no pretend elements into the play situation, as well as extremely stimulus bound by the play materials, with no role taking and a very concrete use of the play materials, towards a level where they showed high originality in the ways toys and play materials were used; where there was also a high amount of pretend elements in the play and a high organization of activity and of role playing; where the children were able to go well beyond the play stimuli as well as to resist interruption of the play by other.

Perhaps the most critical study, as yet unpublished, is one carried out by Dina Feitelson and Gail S. Ross in the Centre for Cognitive Studies at Harvard during the spring of 1972, in which they found that after a period of play training their experimental group significantly increased their scores on a battery of creativity tests. Children who become more imaginative in play can apparently transfer some of that imaginativeness to their responses on conventional tests of creative thinking, such as completing unfinished pictures in a way that no one else would think of, etc. The most obvious reading from this study is the view that creativity is encouraged by the development of imaginativeness in play. Given the great stress that has been placed on creative talent in the modern era, this is a highly important research finding.

Play as variability

So we have the paradox that play seems to be useless, feels like it's not going anywhere, but seems in a number of recent researches to be tied back into some other ways of functioning in the culture of which it is a part. How can we understand or reconcile these quite opposite viewpoints? Perhaps a first step is to realize that in creativity also, a person is usually said to be process oriented. To be innovative one must think beyond conventionally useful ways and must depart from the orientations usually regarded as productive and engage in alternative orientations. In the same fashion creative art has often been defined as a matter of breaking established expectations. Because the artist and the creator pursue their own associations in unique directions which they choose, they come forth with idiosyncratic results. Whether these results are subsequently judged to be worth anything depends on other people. Similarly in play, the relaxation of concern with the usual ends of society permits an exploration of personal reactions and personal associations. In a sense, perhaps, it is the very feeling that what one does does not have to be useful (therefore is useless) that permits this freedom of action and thought to occur. Only with such a heedlessness can play occur, and only if it occurs, can some of the outcomes mentioned above be forthcoming. In this way the very sense of uselessness is germane to its subsequent usefulness, even though widely misapprehended by those who are not participating.

Still these statements, while consistent with the literature, are

perhaps too general. We still need to define play a little more precisely if this sort of approach is to be credible. In the first place, it is necessary to point out that all of a child's voluntary activities are not necessarily play. In the past our opposition towards childish things has led us to call anything which wasn't useful in an adult sense, play. But this seems unparsimonious. Probably most of a child's voluntary activities are directly useful to him as forms of motor, emotional, cognitive or social learning. The work of Piaget and others enables us to see the way in which, through voluntary activity the child step by step adds to his repertoire of responses which enable him to adapt both to his physical surroundings and to the people about him. When one is strenuously learning how to climb the stairs at age 18 months, or to hold a pencil in one's hand correctly at age six years, or to keep one's mouth shut until it's your turn, there isn't much sense in calling that play. These are all forms of adaptation that bring the child into some accommodation with his world. Here adaptation has a clearly objective function, required, recognized and reinforced by the world outside the child's personal self.

What then is play? In a sense it is an opposite type of adaptation having to do with subjective reactions to experience rather than objective accommodation within it. The concern is personal. The high motivation of young children to play would suggest that this putting things together in one's own way is a highly important human reaction despite its discouragement throughout most of human history. Actually even we adults are doing it most of the time ourselves, but in our heads. We call it daydreaming or reverie. And while we may laugh at a child's childish play, how would we like to have our own reveries cast up on a movie screen for others to see. Would they be any less childish with all their resentments, lusts, and exaggerations? Probably not. The only real difference seems to be that we have learned to internalize and keep those things private, while the child has not yet learned such internalizations. He begins to acquire it during early childhood from about 4 to 7 years, it seems. Naturally the adult mental play is somewhat more complex also. As far as we can tell from the cross-cultural evidence on dreams, this type of internal processing and reliving of daily events is universal. Playful daydreaming is probably also universal, even though it may be allowed little external expression. David Riesman once suggested that the only externalization in Puritan times was the hellfire sermon which allowed at least the pastor an imaginative trip. Play seems to parallel dreams in containing at least two types of processing; on the one hand the quire mundane assimilation of daily events and on the other the fairly elaborate and vivid construction of imaginary companions and the like. What these evidence seem to imply is that play is an internally instigated function which will arise in all normal human circumstances. Like a child's ability to dream or to speak or to walk, it will arise wherever there is adequate stimulation, nutrition and freedom of response. It is only in this sense, I believe, that the function is irrational or beyond comprehension. Though once having granted it this normal human status, it is immediately possible to speculate about its neurological, biochemical, biological and psychological supports. As in all cases of human functioning, nothing is sufficient unto itself alone. All structures such as play come to function in the way they do, because of their supportive interaction with surrounding phenomena.

While there has as yet been little thought given to the neurological and biochemical supports for play, it is possible to speculate along biological and anthropological lines. We might argue, for example, that because the child's reactions in play are a form of subjective assimilation of experience, then they will be by definition, highly idiosyncratic and will

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develop in the child, if he plays extensively, a wide range of highly personal reactions to the experiences undergone. Given a crises in the larger culture, such as the demand for a creative response, it would follow that the child with the larger repertoire of such idiosyncratic response, would have the higher probability of making a useful novel response. It is in this sense that play may become a source of novelty. Play is always novelty for the player because it is always personal and not the way things are required around him. But play is not usually novelty in any objective sense. We could say that play mediates novelty. That is, when the child puts his toys together in arrangements that suit him, he is forgoing responses which are idiosyncratic to him and which may someday result, for example, in architectural designs of a highly original symbolic quality. But most of the time, of course, they will not. His play responses thus forge or mediate novelty, but do not in any way guarantee its access to the external cultural world. Play responses thus have a potentiality but no guarantee for cultural usefulness. (We have already granted that they are personally useful in some internal way to the organism, serving perhaps some integrative psychic function as dreams seem to.)

From this type of definition we can then suppose that in the history of human culture, playfulness in children would be encouraged in times of greatest diversity of cultural demand. When the roles to be lived as adults are diversified and relatively unspecificable, then the training of children would need to emphasize a capacity for novel responses. The enormous expansion of play provision and play training in the modern world can be taken as an example of this relationship. We have become so used to it, these past hundred years, that we have not seen that such training in variability was not so characteristic throughout the rest of history. When novel information doubles every decade, children can hardly be taught to survive in the old fashioned way. They must be given a capacity to handle novelty.

The process by which play has become so expanded, I suppose, is that high status adults who were themselves subjected to novel and varying accommodative requirements in their own adult life during the modern era, reacted with a more varied assimilative (dream and day dream) life to accommodate these to these pressures and integrate them in a personal way. They worried more, and they phantazied more. In association with their own children they acted out their fantasies of diversified cleverness in peek-a-boo and imaginative games. We may speculate historically that they projected their need to protect these internal subjective resources of theirs by the establishment of kindergartens and a children's literature. Children became the playthings of the parent's need for novel response capacity. Whether meaning to or not the parents modelled novelty in their behavior with children and then responded to it positively when it was observed. Furthermore with the introduction of toys and games materials, they constantly increased the perimeters of such play activities. We know from recent research that a child's levels of activity are a function of prior experience, even of the number and variety of toys available in the first two years. A finding of some reassurance to those of us who have been stumbling round knee deep in broken toys in our children's nurseries for the past decades. In this fashion the parent's ultimate adaptation to novel economic and scientific demands has given birth to succeeding generations of children even more capable than their fathers of innovating changes in the order of things. Today we are confronted with the need that all children, not just upper status children must be prepared for a world of constant information explosion and role shifting. They must be reinforced in that type of adaptation that maximizes the capacity for variability. And that is play. Unfortunately, we have large segments of society where the child training is still adapted to the relatively routing requirements of manual labor, and where, as was observed above, the parents seek to pass on the upgrading messages of the past century (learning the alphabet) rather than this one (being creative).

To this point then we have sought to set play as a form of variation seeking in its adaptive context. It is a form of potential adaptation only, hence again, the paradoxical sense of uselessness and usefulness. Undoubtedly, its personal nature means that much play, while integrative for the player, always will be trivial, silly, absurd and not useful to anyone else. It is only in the probabilistic sense that it serves non-personal adaptation.

The structure of play

How do we recognize this play phenomena when we see it. It seems that different theorists have emphasized different aspects of its structure. What we need is a description that takes into account any special emotional qualities of motive. Taking the last first, nearly all theorists have emphasized the players sense of mastery, control and autonomy in play. The normal direction of events is reversed, and the player is in charge. Erikson, the outstanding psychoanalyst, bases his theory mainly on this notion of a special form of control that the child exercises over events while in play. In thought or in image or in schema also there is a reversal of direction. The tail now wags the dog. The player rearranges the components of stimuli and response after his own fashion. There is a structural transformation. This is what Piaget focusses upon. Finally there are emotional changes signified by a relaxation of feeling at the onset of the experience and followed often by the states of tension induced by the player and released by him within the larger euphoric context. The definition you prefer for play will tend to reflect the psychological theory which has concentrated on one or other of these essential components. You can emphasize the voluntariness or the structural transformation or the sense of euphoria. In addition, most major theorists have added an ecological definition, saying, in effect, that play is always some place apart from the usual settings of life, or at least is felt so to be. It is micro-scale rather than macro-scale.

In order to conveniently summarize my own notions on this matter, I have found it useful to define play as a form of adaptive inversion. It does seem to be adaptive from phylogenetic and cultural evidence cited above. It is adaptive because it is a part of human behavior and human culture, just as "real" in a different way as so-called "realistic" forms of adaptation. And it is an inversion because it changes the ordinary flow of control; it transforms the structure of experience; it changes the character of emotion; and it operates on micro rather than macro-scale.

The problem with this sort of definition is that it seems to overestimate the novel character of play and to underemphasize its often mentioned repetitive or ritual quality. How can these be dealt with? I think we have to envision play as a continuum which, while always personal, begins at one end with rather repetitive responses to experience and may develop at the other to highly innovative ones. Usually a child's first play with a novel toy, or idea is fairly repetitive as if he takes some time to integrate it in his own personal terms. (He pulls the truck behind him on a string.) If he is left with this toy in familiar surroundings, he then goes on to combine it with other toys and activities. (He fills it with sand and empties it.) And finally he may in certain circumstances transform it into an imaginative game. (He is now the truck driver.) Children in groups are often sufficiently precarious in their social capacities that they are incapable of play except at these earlier levels. Developmentally in typical nursery schools, group play passes through these three levels, repetition, combination and transformation in the years between three and six. But, as mentioned earlier, there are cultural differences in development along this continuum. Even where play is encouraged, children still vary greatly in their access to the higher end of this continuum. It is useful to reserve the word playfulness for this higher end. Some children are more playful in general, others only in specific areas. Which brings us to yet another consideration, namely, that play itself needs to be broken down into a number of different types.

Types of play

For example, all that has been said above would lead to the supposition that play deprivation has been widespread in human culture. But, in fact, that is true only of constructive and sociodramatic plays which are the important modern forms. There are other types of play which seemed to have been self-testing in terms of physical skills. The Eskimos and the Australian aborigines spend endless amounts of play time in testing out their skills with objects and against the environment. From our point of view, in these cultures self-testing is an area where a repertoire of potential variety is a survival necessity. Children from the lower economic levels in our own society show the highest levels of social integration and performance in this form of play. They do well on the slides and climbing apparatuses (although such play is often prevented). Again they perform well in contesting (the social form of self testing), where they have to chase and race, attack and defend, capture and rescue each other. Observation of play levels here shows much variety and playfulness in these areas, which is relatively absent, when it comes to constructive and sociodramatic play. The wise educational lead to the nursery school teacher would be to innovate ways of using these play skills (rather than restricting them which is the more usual response), as a basis to developments of the other sorts. For example, chasing games can be made more imaginative (for four year-olds) by being embellished with role clothing, names, special hideouts, etc. Typically cross-culturally imitation is also dealt with in rather limited and repetitive fashion. Children cling closely to model stereotypes. Imaginary companions and the house games with changing characters, by contract, are a feature of modern civilization. It would again appear as if a wider variety of characters introduced into contests of action might be a route to these imaginative developments.

We might summarize these statements diagrammatically as follows:

Play activities which are universal

exploration
self-testing
imitation

Play activities where cultural differences are marked

constructions (model making, etc.)
contesting (games)
sociodramatic play (including imaginary characters)

Presumably our concern in education would be to see that there is adequate provision for all of these types.

Teaching children to play

If we grant that the area of play activity is the area in which the child has an adaptive capacity for varied behavior, then teaching children to play becomes a means of protecting them from adaptive deficit. It has been an important part of my argument to demonstrate that only play of a rather minimal sort can be taken for granted. We cannot, therefore, assume that play needs no encouragement. This protective attitude while a useful defense against those who prevent children from playing at all, because they think they should be learning alphabets, is no defense against the types of cultural and economic relativity indicated above.

To date the only systematic play on behalf of children has been aimed at increasing their sociodramatic play (Smilansky) or their constructive play (Freyburg & Feitelson). All of these workers emphasize direct participation by the adult so that the play itself is modelled for the child. That is, the adult does not talk about the play, but begins to play by being truck driver, mother nursing doll or whatever. Feitelson says: "We soon came to recognize

that one of the most important factors towards creating a successful play teaching session was to have the play teacher continue by all means a flow of active connected play. A flow which would not be interrupted by questions directed to the child in an effort to engage him actively. Our records show that such questions most often remained unanswered, a fact which seldom failed to fluster the teacher. "What do you want to play?" was thus the most fatal of beginnings for any teaching session. But also: "Here is a doll' what shall we name her?" Or "Look at this nice car; where is it going?" never failed to stop any burgeoning signs of interest and rapport. Equally bad was, "What shall we do not?" after one play situation had been brought to a satisfactory end. If, as we assume all along, the child has had no real experience of imaginative play, we cannot hope that he will be able to provide initiative in situations like this. It is only when the play already runs along that he will be able to mobilize his resources. When the play teacher has already established that the doll will not eat meat, and therefore is busy preparing various typical meal elements like meat, cake, etc., the child might be able to draw on his own experience and contribute a first suggestion, e.g. bread. Actually an earlier step would in most cases be just picking up something the teacher produced and holding it to the doll's mouth, maybe emitting a munching sound. (From Dina Feitelson, "Developing creativity" Early Childhood Development and Care, Vol. 1, 1972 - in press.)

As a point of clarification it should be mentioned that the enormous amount of playing done in play therapy over the past 50 years was not of this sort. There it was assumed the child "naturally" knew the language of imaginative play, and could use it to express deeper feelings as long as the therapist established a warm and permissive relationship. This assumption worked reasonably well with most of the upper status children traditionally dealt with by play therapists and play analysts.

We do not have to worry much about teaching children to play at testing (gymnastics and movement for example) and contesting (games). These have usually been protected and fostered by professionals in the physical education movement. It is of incidental interest that only recently have gymnastics been used to the extent that they could be with young girls, in the U.S.A. Prior to then a girl's excellence on the playground bars, swing or jungle gym was simply neglected by the larger culture, even though at age 7, or 8 years, girls are generally far superior to these apparatuses than the same age boys. An argument could well be made, although it remains to be researched, that the development of confidence through such self-testing when carried on into adolescence (gymnastics, skiing, climbing, swimming) and adulthood might be a major counterweight to the pervasive fear of failure which is otherwise so widely encouraged in the training of young girls and women.

I would not want to suggest that all is well with testing and contesting. While they were the areas of cultural supervision and reinforcement given the most attention throughout history because of the modern circumstances of urban and apartment living, it looks as if we might have to pay much more attention to these than hitherto. There is a program of such activities to be gone through in order to develop maximum competence and maximum variability and this program is very haphazardly engineered in the present circumstances of society. (See Herron, R.E. & Sutton-Smith, B, Childs Play. N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1971).

The two play types of construction and sociodrama have been long taken for granted with middle and high status children, and now, being focussed in the nursery school training programs mentioned above, have received only incidental attention in elementary schooling. The primary area for sociodramatic stimulation has been in children's theatre, a fairly formal exercise. More

recent improvisational drama with children has afforded more opportunity for the personal exploration of varied forms of response. Though even here there tends to be a learning of poses, postures and gestures of representation which, though they increase the children's competence at such things, are also inclined to be treated too intellectually. My impression is that the psychodramatic approach to improvisation is really superior because it focusses on the individual's unique feeling rather than his improvisational competence. This means that the "acting out" of problems keeps in touch with his needs for idiosyncratic expression. I suspect that all acting training for children should be mainly in this mode in the first years of work. As the child comes to use the vehicle in his own spontaneous way, then he becomes increasingly able to master its disciplines without loss of his own dramatic authenticity.

To talk this way, of course, is to cross the line from play into art. In the latter the child's purely personal play variability must be channeled for the purposes of communication through some particular media with its own structures and requirements additional to those of play proper. A real training in sociodramatic play, however, would consist in a higher level form of the type of activity suggested by Feitelson above. Usually elementary age children carry this sort of activity on only in the company of best friend playmates, and in local neighborhoods. It can be encouraged at school by wardrobes and settings being provided for it; encouraged also by psychodramatic training. But perhaps more importantly, it can be encouraged by the teacher who amusingly enjoys quite informally slipping in and out of different characters herself in her own joking and playful relationships with the children. This marginal role taking off and on throughout other activities might be considered to induce a maximum degree of flexibility in teacher-child role relationships.

Constructive activities have usually prospered well wherever there has been stimulation and freedom for the development of varied art forms as in painting, crafts, poetry, music. Often these activities are simply taught to children and contain no provided place for playfulness except surreptitiously. But as most of us are good at such surreptition, we can assume considerable play activity to take place. Where the children are given sufficient leeway to work their own way with the materials, then it can be maximized.

Conclusion

The paradox of play is that it is useless if you know where you're going, and if the pressures of adaptation require a very clear cut response. But if there is some uncertainty about the future, and if it pays to be a person of considerable flexibility with a wide repertoire of potential responses up his sleeve, then it is most useful to have had the playful experience of considering the various alternatives beforehand. As the modern world seems to be excessively confusing and complex in its problems and demands, it would seem that any education system that did not maximize a child's play capacities is guiding him down a blind alley. Any education system that lets a child go forth with play deficits, leaves him illequipped for what lies ahead. Variability training is now the form of adaptation that this world requires. And play is that adaptive system which because of its unique integrative role in personal expression, at the same time prepares the child for such varied demands.